

[De Trubles I's Seen]

DE TROUBLES I's SEEN

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260 Strong Street

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I. B. Hawkes DE TROUBLES I's SEEN

I went out one morning to get a Negro woman to do some washing for me. I wanted a certain [Negroes?] who had formerly worked for my mother, so I went to the address where she used to live. Lil was at home.

She lived on a steep, rocky street in a very dilapidated house, and in the side yard smoke was rising from the fire around the wash pot.

“Goodness me, Miss, I sho' is glad to see you. I ain't seen you in so long! Come on in, chile. Ain't you cold? I has a good fire inside.”

Lil offered me the most comfortable chair in the house. “Sit down here, Miss,” she said, “I wants to talk to you a while.”

“I really haven't much time,” I said, “but I do want you to do some washing for me this week, will you?”

“Why, yes, chile, you knows I'll do anything for you, but fust let's talk about old times. You know, I've been kinder worried and seen a lot since I worked for you. I sho' was sorry you let me go, but does you remember the fust time I ever saw you, chile?”

“I think I do,” I said, “but you tell me.”

“Well, I seen you comin' 'cross the hill one evening with a big basket, I was wonderin' if you was comin' to my house and sho' 'nuff you walked up to me and said, ‘Here, Lil, this is something my mother sent you and your babies. She said for you to feed them and eat some yourself, that she was tired of hearing them babies cry.’ Then, next day I washed them dishes and went to yo' ma an' worked all that week for your ma, ‘cause she sho' was 2 good to me - and you too. Honey, befo' she died. Well, course, it is like this; we

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lose track o' people - lak us did. I sho' is had a hard time too. I got jobs anywhere I could, serving as scrubwoman, washwoman, or maid, earning no certain amount, an' had five chilluns 'fo I stopped. My husband, Sam, was a smart man and he was good to me a long time, but as my chilluns got older he got to where he stopped giving us money. You know, I couldn't feed five chilluns on a little fifty cent a week washin'. Two dollars a month for washin' don't buy much, Miss, and I had to pay \$1.50 a month house rent on top of dat.

"Sam stayed on at home wif us. You remember how things was sometimes. You give us some meat and corn meal to help us out some, jus' like yo' ma did. Miss, I stood that treatment long as I could then I jus' got me a man named Ike to help me out wif my chilluns. Well, Ike did help me, but we got to drinkin' a lot together. That didn't do; we took money the chilluns needed and so the fust thing I knowed we was fightin'. Then Sam got to stayin' out more and more and he got him a woman too. Well, it was all right for me to have a man, I thought, but when he got that woman I flew up and got a [devorse?]. My chilluns didn't like that so such, but I jus' went on livin' with Ike then, but I was worried about Sam. I stayed drunk all the time till Ike and me got worser and worser. Well, I tell yo' this much I know I jus' had to do somethin'. Well, I kinder think God took a hand in my affairs about then; my ma and two of my sisters got sick. Well, I went to see them every two weeks. Sam come 'round more then and helped me some wif the chilluns. My po' ma died and my sisters and brothers wouldn't help me with the expenses. Even my only aunt had insurance on her, but would not 3 give me a cent to bury her. I'm still paying on that funeral. My sister died after several months and the county had to pay that; I couldn't.

"My oldest daughter got married, too, about then and went to Atlanta to live. Honey, she married a real man! He don't mistreat her one bit. Up to now they has got two chilluns. One little boy died, but she has got two left. She helped me a lot after she married and let one of the chilluns come to see her and stay so I wouldn't have such a hard time suppo'tin' them that stayed with me. She put Joe in school there and he got some learning.

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"Dis man Ike I took up wif was still hangin' 'round all dis time. Sam, he didn't know much 'bout him, but I knowed he was wonderin' all this time where I was gettin' help.

"The other chilluns was growin' up now and Ruth, next to the oldest girl, got sick, so I had to stay at home after that and wash and iron. I could not leave home to work out any. Sam begin to go out again with this woman of his. I sho' did hate it too, 'cause I loves that nigger til' dis day. My man Ike then begin to help me a little more 'cause Ruth was getting worse, and only one of the boys was big 'nuff to help me at all, and he worked at a small groc'ry store. He didn't make much and half the time he took up all he made by Saturday night in groceries an' we couldn't draw a cent. Well, Sam got to comin' home drunk and bustin' down the doors an' ravin' an' pitchin' all night. Sometimes he would run Ruth's fever up so high til' I would have to hold her on the bed.

"One day Sam come in drunk and was cussin' me 'bout Ike. I told him he didn't have no business 'round here at all; I paid house rent and wanted 4 him to git out, but he would not do it. About this time Sam lost his job and I don't know where he went for three months. Me and Ike, thought, made it fine for a while. We bought us some new things as you see.

"One day my oldest boy that was workin' come home. Ike was in the other room talking to him very loud and I wondered what in the world was the matter. Well, I went in and ike was demanding my boy to bring home all his pay that night and Frank, my boy, was tryin' to tell him that he had brought groceries home for us to eat and he couldn't bring any money home. Ike jumped on Frank and I thought he would kill him befo' I could stop him. I quit Ike then and took in all the washin' I could git. I had four washings that brought me \$4.00 a week. At night I would be so tired til' I could not sleep. I thought Ike was comin' back to take my furniture 'way from me every day, but I see now he was waitin' to work his way back in.

"I got in with another man one day 'bout a month after I quit Ike. His name was Harry, but, Honey, I could not stand him. He come in one day and said he heard I had another man

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on the string and he was goin' to kill me. Of course I did not think harry meant it, but I want you to know he didn't do a thing but draw a knife on me and cut my throat. I got a scar on my throat that never will go 'way. Sam got home that night from Tennessee and I was in bed. He said, 'Gal, what ails you?' I told him. Lawd chile, that nigger went out of this door and went to look for Harry. Sam found him all right and cut harry's insides out; I mean all of them. Well, Sam left for a while, but they caught him and turned him loose.

"Ruth got well and went out and got married, I guess. I never did see 5 no man though, but she sho' had this baby. She was sick all time after this baby come, finally I had a doctor with her and he said she had a 'leakage of the heart' and would not live long. I found out later that someone gave her some whiskey when she was a baby. That's what caused her to be sickly all her life. Well, Ruth died with this awful disease. Chile, she swelled up till she liked to bu'sted 'fo she died.

"By this time my oldest boy had left home. He said he just could not stand things like that no longer. My next boy, his name is John, got a job on a beer truck helpin' out.

"Well, I jus' didn't know what to do 'cause 'bout this time all the men had left me and this grandchild had to have milk. I could not go out anywhere and leave her. I didn't dream about Ike, that had the trouble with Frank, comin' back. But, bless your soul, one day Ike come walkin' up behind me while I was washin'.

"You know, after all that happened between the family, Ike had done a lot for me and he sho' did look good, too! But I was going to play off stubbon and make out like I was still mad at him, but he said, "You jus' put that washin' aside for a while, gal. I's got somethin' to say to you'. Well, I put everything aside and we went in the house and sat down. Ike begin to tell me that he wanted to come home and he would be good to my chilluns and especially to the little baby girl of Ruth's. Ike had already bought things for the house to make it more comfortable, so I took him back and he has been with me now seven years, and I haven't seen Sam. My chilluns is all growing fast and is healthy, 'cause I was and

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iron so I can stay at 6 home. Ike is smart and works hard and brings me money home every Saturday. He sho' has stuck to his promise to me. Come on, Miss, and let's look at the other part of the house. I jus' want you to see what people can do when they want to.

"Oh, yes", she said, while getting up, "we still has our little parties sometimes, but not rough ones like we use to, 'cause we found out it won't do."

We walked into the next room which was a bedroom too. It had an iron bed with a pretty bright silk spread on it, lace curtains at the windows, a vanity dresser, and a small table with a lamp on it, a rocker, a straight chair, and a neat small grass rug on the floor. Then in the kitchen there was a small green and cream-colored range in one corner, a home-made cabinet and breakfast set against the wall, green curtains at the windows, and a worn rug on the floor.

"Now, I and Ike is paying down on dis little shack, which ain't so much to look at, but by stintin' ourself of the things we feels we is got to have, we is paid a nice little sum of money on dis place and soon we is going to own dis little old house and lot.

"Now you see, miss, I am proud I did stay with ike after all. The funny part of it is - Ike come from the same county I did."

"What county did you come from, Lil?" I asked.

We both come from Oglethorpe County. An' we was both farmers. My childhood days was very happy and Ike says his was, too. We didn't either one of us have much schooling, but we can write our names. Well, Miss, I will be over to git the clothes after while."